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ARANSAS REFUGE AREA CLOSED TO WATERFOWL SHOOTING TO PROTECT RARE WHOOPING CRANES

To afford more protection to the rare whooping cranes that winter on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, an area of 4,640 acres of land and water adjoining the refuge has been closed to migratory waterfowl hunting, the Department of the Interior announced today.

The regulation constitutes a revision and enlargement of the closed area boundary originally covered by a Presidential Proclamation of April 15, 1941. A "Notice of Intention" to adopt the regulation closing the 4,640-acre area was issued on October 14, 1955. No protests were received. The closure has been approved by the Texas Game and Fish Commission.

The closing of the area, Secretary Seaton explained, will afford greater protection to the surviving flock of whooping cranes--now numbering less than 30 birds--since a portion of the area is occupied by the cranes during their winter stay on the Aransas Refuge.

"Inasmuch as the Department's Fish and Wildlife Service has a joint stewardship with Canada's Wildlife Service over these cranes, we intend to do everything we can to protect the birds while they are within the confines of this country in order to send the flock back intact each spring to its breeding grounds in Canada," Secretary Seaton declared.

According to the last recorded count, there were only 27 whooping cranes still in existence. Twenty-one cranes went north in 1955 and 20 adults and eight young came back to the Aransas Refuge in the fall of that year. One adult was missing. During the winter another adult disappeared. The brood of eight in 1955 is the largest number of progeny noted since the first official count was made in 1938-39. In 1941-42 there were only 15 whoopers. In 1949-1950 there were 34 of these giant birds that are close to five feet in height, with a wingspread of seven feet. Despite Federal efforts to save the unique birds from extinction, natural losses and careless or malicious gunfire have held down the growth of the flock.

The Aransas National Wildlife Refuge was established by an Executive Order of December 31, 1937, on the Blackjack Peninsula of Texas, for the protection of all kinds of wildlife. It is best known, however, as the wintering home of the cranes. About halfway down the Texas coast, some 75 miles north of Corpus Christi, the peninsula lies inside Matagorda Island from which it is separated by the Intracoastal Waterway. The refuge covers about 47,000 acres.

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